

## Diversity, Disadvantage and Differential Outcomes: An Analysis of Samoan Students Narratives of Schooling.

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### **Abstract:**

Social justice discourses, particularly those attentive to the politics of difference, suggest that the perspectives of least-advantaged groups need to be taken into account when endeavouring to realise social justice in education for these groups. In this paper, we analyse narratives on schooling produced by one cohort of least-advantaged students, namely Samoan students attending state-designated disadvantaged secondary schools in Queensland, Australia. Specifically, the narratives of educational disadvantage provided by Samoan students are analysed. The focus is on 'the what' (the knowledge to be transmitted) and 'the how' (the teacher-student relations) of pedagogy in state-designated disadvantaged schools. Attention is paid to the contradictory and ambivalent discourses inherent in these narratives, particularly in terms of realising socially just pedagogic practices.

## **Diversity, Disadvantage and Differential Outcomes: An Analysis of Samoan Students' Narratives of Schooling.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, we analyse narratives on schooling produced by Samoan students in one case study secondary school. The analysis focuses on the themes of 'teacher-student relations' and 'general classroom practices' emerging from the student narratives. These themes are significant for two reasons. Firstly they constitute the dominant themes in the narratives of schooling produced by students interviewed for this study. Secondly, a substantial body of research literature suggests that everyday classroom practices produce significant differences in educational and social outcomes for students (see Ladwig, Lingard & Luke, 1999). We argue that systematic understandings of pedagogic models, rather than ideological struggles over 'the right' pedagogy, are crucial to designing and implementing classroom practices that might make a difference for 'least-advantaged' students (Bernstein, 1996; Rose, 1999). Moreover, we suggest that the implementation of competing and contradictory pedagogic models in schools may inadvertently disadvantage the very groups they are purporting to empower. An analysis of students' narratives of schooling may contribute to systematic understandings of "which pedagogies might make a difference, for which clientele of students, and in which contexts" (see Ladwig, Lingard & Luke, 1999: 20).

The students interviewed for this study attended a state-designated disadvantaged secondary school in Queensland, Australia.<sup>1</sup> The category 'disadvantaged' was formulated by the state education department to facilitate "meaningful comparisons" across schools on the basis of "contextual characteristics", namely school size, socio-economic status and the proportion of the population that was of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.<sup>2</sup> The objective was to allocate additional resources to schools categorised as 'disadvantaged' in order to promote equality of educational outcomes.

Since the early 1990s, equality of educational outcomes has been a consistent theme of curricula and policy documents of Education Queensland, the state department of education.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the Social Justice Strategy (Department of Education 1992a, 1992b, 1994a, 1994b) with its focus on target groups,<sup>4</sup> made the perspectives of least-advantaged groups integral to the endeavour of dealing with equity issues through attention to the politics of difference and disadvantage. A general principle of the strategy was that "...[t]he issue of social justice will not be an add on, but a fundamental aspect of educational provision in Queensland state schools" (Department of Education, 1994a: 8). This principle was tied to a critical consensus that the perspectives of the least-advantaged groups in society must be made central to realising social justice in education. In terms of pedagogic practice this meant:

...[t]hat we think through economic issues from the standpoint of the poor, not of the rich. We think through gender arrangements from the standpoint of women. We think through race relations and land questions from the standpoint of indigenous peoples. We think through questions of sexuality from the standpoint of gay people (Connell, 1993: 43).

As enrolments of Samoan students increased in Queensland schools, and test results indicated low educational attainment levels,<sup>5</sup> teachers sought to 'know' this group. Pedagogical methods outlined in the Social Justice Strategy such as naming groups as 'least-advantaged', and positioning students to speak as 'least-advantaged', were utilised to produce knowledge about Samoan students.

This paper explores issues of 'teacher-student relations' and 'effective classroom practices' from the perspectives of a cohort of least-advantaged students namely, students who identified as Samoan, spoke Samoan at home, and were enrolled in state-designated disadvantaged schools. The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section a description is provided of the students interviewed for the study. The theoretical concerns and analytic methods that informed the study are then explained. This is followed by an analysis of the themes emerging from the interview data. The paper concludes by relating the analysis to implications for realising social justice in education.

### **SAMOAN STUDENTS AT SANUNDER HIGH<sup>6</sup>**

Most of the students interviewed for the study attended Sanunder High, a designated disadvantaged secondary school, with a long history of involvement in social justice programs. At the time of this study, Sanunder High was one of the few schools in Queensland that had institutionalised a Head of Department position dedicated to social justice. The Social Justice Department at Sanunder was responsible for managing and developing:

- the English as a Second Language (ESL) program,
- learning support for low achieving students,
- provisions for students with disabilities,
- cultural equity programs,
- a supportive school environment program for students with behavioural difficulties,
- the Student Council,
- a Support-A-Reader program involving teacher-aides from the local community, and
- the peer support program (fieldnotes 28.7.97).

In addition, the Head of Department (Social Justice), also known as the social justice coordinator, was responsible for producing the 'Sanunder High Social Justice News', developing the 'Reconciliation School' project, and organising student symposiums on cultural and racial relationships in the school. For the 1997 symposium, students were asked to consider the following questions:

- What are the issues being faced in schools related to cultural differences and race?
- What is currently being done to address these issues?
- What things can be done in the future to address these issues?

In the words of the social justice coordinator, school policies at Sanunder were informed by three views on justice, namely procedural, distributive and enabling.

*Broadly speaking, this equates with equality of opportunity (procedural), equality of outcomes (distributive) and equality of respecting difference (enabling). The last view of social justice means that the school has to critically look at the ways in which it colonises the identities of students of cultural difference, specifically focusing on the ways in which the*

*school colonises the identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students* (field notes, 8.8.98).

The Samoan teacher-aides employed in the Social Justice Department at Sanunder High nominated students<sup>7</sup> to participate in the study in the first instance. However, as the ethnographic component of the study progressed researchers asked students to contribute to an interview.<sup>8</sup> Thus the cohort of 33 interview participants included approximately equal numbers of males (15) and females (18). Also represented in this cohort were students who had low levels of educational attainment (23), as well as those who were achieving pass grades or higher in their school subjects (10). The students all indicated that they attended church services regularly, but were members of different religious denominations such as Assemblies of God, Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, Methodist and Uniting Church. All the students were interviewed in a group of two for approximately 30 minutes. In most cases, Fofoa Safotu a member of the research team who was also a member of the Samoan community and a qualified teacher participated in the interview context. The interviews were semi-structured and guided by a set of questions designed to elicit information about:

- Australian-Samoan identity formation in school and community institutions
- Relations between teachers and Samoan students in Australian schools
- Relations of Samoan students to school curriculum
- Pedagogic work that might improve educational outcomes for Samoan students

All of the interviews were in English and were conducted on school sites, either in classrooms, school grounds or on school camp locations. All of the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in full.

The students participating in the study were between the ages of 15 and 17. All of these students indicated that Samoan was spoken at home, while 42% stated that the language of the home was exclusively Samoan. Nobody suggested that English was the only language spoken at home. Sixteen of the students furnished information about length of residency in Australia. Half of these sixteen students noted that they had lived in Australia for at least one quarter of their lives, while nearly one third had lived in Australia for at least half of their lives. Furthermore, of these sixteen students one was born in American Samoa, four were born in Western Samoa, and eleven were born in New Zealand. In other words, nearly two-thirds of the students interviewed for the study had migrated with their families from New Zealand to Australia. In what follows the theoretical framework that informed the data analysis is detailed.

## **INTERVIEW DATA ANALYTIC STRATEGIES**

We interpreted the student interview data produced for this study as a set of narratives on schooling. Narratives are constituted by discourses. We note that the term discourse signifies a multitude of meanings for researchers working in diverse disciplinary traditions (*i.e.*, sociolinguistics, poststructuralist feminisms, critical literacy). However, for the purposes of this paper, we use the term to refer to the institutionalised use of language and language-like sign systems operating at the level of state bureaucracy (social justice policies, mathematics syllabus), the school (cultural awareness sessions,

science lessons), and the small-group interview level (Davies & Harre, 1990:45). Discourses can develop around a specific topic, such as equity, disadvantage and difference. In addition, discourses can compete with each other or they can create distinct and incompatible versions of reality. Discourses do not simply identify or describe objects, knowledge and people; they constitute and regulate them, and in the practice of doing so, conceal their own invention (Weedon, 1987). In other words, we suggest that the interview data do not represent the 'truth' about schooling. Rather, as realisations of various competing discourses on schooling the data constitute claims to 'truth'.

### **Theorising Discourses on Schooling as Pedagogic Discourse(s)**

The narratives produced by students were about a particular topic (teacher-student relations, classroom practices), in a specific location (school sites), and orchestrated by an interviewer who was often viewed by the interviewees as a teacher-like figure. It is thus highly probable that the narratives produced by students were at least partially constructed from state official discourses on schooling and social justice. Moreover, it is highly probable that students' narratives were constructed from discourses circulating in the home, community and other institutions responsible for teaching-learning or pedagogical practices. Thus the narratives are likely to be constituted by competing and contradictory discourses on schooling and equity.

Because the student narratives focused on discourses of schooling, concepts from Basil Bernstein's (1996) theory of pedagogic discourse and Ian Hunter's (1994) genealogical study of the modern school were integrated to develop conceptual categories for analysis of the data. We are aware that the theories developed by both of these researchers have been vigorously debated and contested within the academy. However, they are useful for our data analysis for the following reasons. First, the theories have been systematically informed by empirical studies of pedagogic models constituted within the institution of the modern school. Second, the contradictory and ambivalent discourses on equity produced and institutionalised within the modern school have been rigorously analysed in these theoretical frameworks. Third, theoretical links have been made between macro level state policies on schooling and micro level classroom practices. Fourth, the theories complement each other because one traces discourses of equity and schooling using a genealogical approach (Hunter, 1994), while the other focuses on the structures or principles generating pedagogic models, subjects (teacher and student identities) and instructional discourses (Bernstein, 1996).

Bernstein (1990, 1996) defines pedagogic discourse as a recontextualizing principle which selects and embeds two discourses, instructional discourse (ID) and regulative discourse (RD), to produce a single discourse represented thus: ID/RD. The solidus indicates the incorporation or embedding of the instructional discourse in the regulative discourse, such that the latter dominates the former. Pedagogic discourse is constituted by 'recontextualizing agents', that is, a hierarchy of educational researchers, curriculum producers, teachers and community representatives. Instructional discourse is the knowledge

that is selected, organised, and defined in evaluative criteria for the purposes of teaching-learning. Thus the instructional discourse constitutes the “trained capacities and lifestyles” to be distributed to the school population (Hunter, 1994: 95). The objective here in terms of equality of educational outcomes is to develop systems that would hoist disadvantaged groups to a standard of social life and educational attainment already reached by the elite. Regulative discourse establishes the order within the instructional discourse, that is, the arbitrary internal order for the transmission of school subjects. It generates principles of selection, organisation, pacing and criteria of skills and concepts. Moreover, it mobilises theories of instruction which constitute relations between teacher and learner (*i.e.*, *who* controls the selection, organisation, pacing and criteria of instruction). According to Hunter (1994), the objective here is to develop systems that would constitute persons capable of comporting themselves as self-reflecting and self-governing individuals. In terms of equality of educational outcomes the regulative discourse refers to the “absolute moral right to self-realisation, claimed on behalf of our common humanity or universal moral personality” (Hunter, 1994: 95).

Moreover, pedagogic discourse is realised within a moral discourse that constitutes the arbitrary social order and relations between agents, that is, teachers, paraprofessionals and students within schools. The conduct, character and manner of these agents are thus constituted by the principles of moral discourse(s). Contradictory and conflicting moral discourses pertaining to appropriate conduct, character and manner of teachers and students may be ‘recontextualised’ by different factions of the community.

The instructional and regulative discourses of schooling thus operate in different ethical and political registers at the same time – to satisfy the demands of conscience and the objectives of government. These two components of pedagogic discourse, the instructional and the regulative are the direct outcome of the modern school’s bureaucratic organisation and its pastoral pedagogy.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, it was through the education ‘bureau’ that “states conceptualised and organised that massive and ongoing program of pacification, discipline and training responsible for the political and social capacities of the modern citizen” (Hunter, 1994: 60). A non-violent, tolerant and pragmatic sphere of political deliberation was created by forcefully separating the public comportment of the citizen from the private persona of the ‘man of conscience’ and by subordinating absolutes to government objectives. On the other hand, “it was Christian pastoralism that disseminated the comportment of the self-reflective person and that it did so via a pedagogy of moral ‘subjectification’ which remains at the heart of modern schooling (Hunter, 1994: 60-61).

Pedagogic discourse and practice are generated by principles of power and control. According to Bernstein (1996) symbolic power relations refer to the strength of the insulation of the boundaries between categories of pedagogic agents (*i.e.*, teachers-students), instructional discourses, and institutional spaces. In other words, “power relations ... create boundaries, legitimize boundaries, reproduce boundaries, between different categories of groups, gender, class, race, different categories of discourse, different categories of spaces. Thus power always operates to produce dislocations, to produce

punctuations in social space” (Bernstein 1996: 19). Insulations between categories may be weak or strong. Where the insulations are strong, the rule is: things must be kept apart. Where insulations are weak, the rule is: things must be brought together. In the case of strong insulation “each category has its unique identity, its unique voice, its own specialized rules of internal relations” (Bernstein, 1996: 21). In the case of weak insulation, there are less specialized discourses, identities and rules of internal relations. However, weak or strong insulations always carry power relations that relay legitimate principles of social and moral order.

Relations of symbolic control refer to **who** exercises control of **what** in terms of:

- The selection of the communication;
- Its sequencing (what comes first, what comes second);
- Its pacing (the rate of expected acquisition);
- The criteria; and
- The control over the social base which makes this transmission possible (Bernstein, 1996: 27).

Relations of social control thus refer to the regulative principles of the social and discursive order. The rules of the social order refer to the forms that the hierarchical relations take in the pedagogic relation and to expectations about conduct, character and manner. Where the regulative principles of social control are strong student identities may be constituted as ‘conscientious’, ‘attentive’, ‘industrious’, ‘careful’ and ‘receptive’. Where they are weak student identities may be constituted as ‘creative’, ‘interactive’, and ‘risk-takers’. The latter necessitates the student to make more of him/herself open to regulation.

The rules of the discursive order refer to selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of school knowledge. In the case of strong or visible relations of control, the teacher makes explicit to students the principles generating the selection, organisation and evaluative criteria of school knowledge. In the case of weak or invisible relations of control, the principles generating the selection, sequencing and evaluative criteria of school knowledge are known to the teacher and not to the students. Thus, more of the student is open to regulation as s/he attempts to discover the criteria for displaying academic performance. Principles of control therefore carry the boundary relations of power and socialise individuals into these relations. At the same time, the principles of control carry the potential for change in power relations.

The following questions guided the data analysis:

- What categories of instructional discourses were selected for transmission?
- Was the strength of the insulation separating categories of agents, discourses and spaces strong or weak?
- Who (teachers or students) selected and organised the instructional discourse?
- What criteria defined the acquisition of instructional discourse?
- What models of the teacher, student and the pedagogic relation were incorporated within the pedagogic discourse?

## INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS<sup>10</sup>

In what follows, extracts of interview data are organised in two main sections. In the first section, we analyse students' responses to broad interview questions pertaining to their experiences of schooling. In these data extracts discourses on race and/or ethnicity were invoked and held accountable by the students for producing strong insulation boundaries between students, institutional spaces and school knowledge. In the second section, data extracts pertaining to school curricula and teacher-student relations are analysed. In these extracts, students did not accord salience to discourses on race, ethnicity or cultural difference. Rather, students' difficulties in school were attributed to English language proficiency, scholastic competence in particular subjects, and the pedagogic modes deployed by particular teachers.

### **Discourses on Racism, Difference and Disadvantage<sup>11</sup>**

Generally, students spoke favourably about their interactions with teachers as a cohort, although they mentioned experiencing difficulties with individual teacher(s). To illustrate difficulties that students encountered with individual teachers, we now turn to an extract of data taken from an interview with Lomitusi S. A male student enrolled in Year 10, Lomitusi S attended church regularly, spoke and wrote Samoan fluently, and wanted to become a body builder. The interview began with the question: "*What do you like, well, what don't you like, about Sanunder*". The student replied "*Violence, racism it seems to me*". He then went on to talk about relations between different groups of students (Asians, Aboriginal, Polynesian and European) in the school. The topic of racist interaction between students led to the following account of a particular teacher.

#### **Extract One**

- (1) *Lomitusi S: Sometimes, it...[racism]...doesn't occur, it occurs to other people as well, Asians and all that. This ... teacher, he ah, he was racist. I know cause like, he was quiet during the lesson, to us, but once the class went away, this Aboriginal guy stayed inside. The teacher told him that "all these Polynesians should go back to their island". When I heard that, I got really angry and I went, I went up to his staffroom, and I told him "if we have to go back to our country, why don't you go back to your own country" where he came from. And he said "this is my country." And I said "no, it's not your country". I felt really bad, and I goes "your country is in England", and, I just slipped my tongue. I swore at him. And he ... just like kept quiet.*
- (2) *R: And did anything happen as a result of that? That was the end of it?*
- (3) *Lomitusi S: Then I told him, if he's got anything to say about my culture, "say it to my face, right now", I said. "Right now!" He goes, and he just kept quiet, ( ). "You don't have to say things behind people's backs, just to people's faces", and he just sat down on the desk and started (writing). I go up to him and I threw his book down. "There, next time if you say something real bad, it's going to be a (bad) day." Like I felt really angry then. [And as I walked] out ... I slammed the door. But that really hurt me, when I heard that, ( ). That also happened to an Asian as well. Like, there was too many Asians in our school. Well there's not too many Asians, but the same teacher told ... that Aboriginal guy, that "all the Asians ought to go back." I felt real bad about that.*
- (4) *R: Do you think that, you know, there's sort of an underlying feeling there among the teachers, or this is just one person, you know, he's the odd one out ... ?*
- (5) *Lomitusi S: Most of the teachers are good to me.*

In this extract of data, Lomitusi S provided an account of what he perceived to be an instance of racism. He told a story of what was said and done face-to-face in the heat of the moment in a localised context. In this respect, this particular data extract was quite similar to most students' narratives of racism. All of



the students interviewed for the study spoke about racialised power relations between teachers, teacher-aides, and Samoan students, and between groups of students organised on the basis of ethnic attributes. From Lomitusi S's particular perspective, one teacher grouped students along ethnic lines as members of the Australian community and immigrants who should return home. Power relations structured strong insulations between these hierarchically organised categories. Polynesian and Asian students were positioned in the subordinate category. Lomitusi S also spoke of how he challenged the power relations structured by the teacher. He positioned the teacher as an immigrant alongside those students who had been categorised as 'Asians' and 'Polynesians'. Through this discursive strategy he asserted the rights of all immigrants, 'Asian', 'Polynesian' and 'Anglo' to call Australia home. The weakening of the insulation between these categories produced a change in power relations between agents (Anglo teacher and migrant students) and discourses (Australian identity and nationhood).

Racialised relations between a teacher and students may have implications for the differential distribution of knowledge. In Bernstein's (1996, 1990) terms, conduct, character and manner between agents in the social order of the classroom may affect the structuring of the discursive order. In the above account, however, it is not clear if this particular teacher's actions influenced the selection, organisation and distribution of school knowledge to students categorised as 'Asian' and 'Polynesian'. Moreover, Lomitusi S indicated that the racialised relations between this particular teacher and students were not generalised to the social and moral order of the whole school. Put differently, not all teachers at the school conducted themselves in a racist manner. Indeed, Lomitusi S indicated that "*most of the teachers were good*" to him.

In contrast to Lomitusi S's everyday account of racism, Amoga N a male year 10 student, talked about school-wide institutionalised practices that produced strongly insulated boundaries between groups of students on the criteria of ethnicity. Amoga N identified as Samoan claiming "*I'm proud of being Samoan.*" He spoke English and Samoan fluently and worked diligently in his studies to obtain the necessary grades to gain entry to paralegal studies at university. He was achieving well above average in Mathematics and English, having progressed from a lower to a higher academic class during his time at Sanunder High School. However, his ambition to pursue university studies was not totally supported by his parents who wanted him to consider religion as a vocation. Both of his parents were very active members of the local Assembly of God (Pentecostal) church, where the services were conducted in Samoan.

Extract Two was taken from an interview that began with a discussion of relations between students in the school. This discussion was initiated by the researcher's question "*tell me a little bit about life at Sanunder for you*". Amoga N responded to this question by comparing the social group arrangements of students in the Sanunder school grounds to those at his previous school of attendance. He stated that at his previous school "*there wasn't really a division in cultures, like at this school they have Vietnamese*

*in separate areas and Polynesians in separate areas*". He then produced a discourse about the arbitrary allocation of 'Polynesian' students to 'lower classes' within the school. Criteria or judgements on the basis of ethnicity rather than academic attainment or English language proficiency were accorded salience within this discourse. Put differently, the model of the learner and teacher-student relations structuring the discursive order of school curricula and institutional spaces were inculcated with racial attributes.

### **Extract Two**

- (1) **R:** *And how do you know that the students are organised in ability groups?*
- (2) **Amoga N:** *Oh ((pause))*
- (3) **R:** *Everyone knows?*
- (4) **Amoga N:** *I don't know. I just don't, I just don't think it was a coincidence that we were all put in a lower class. I think it would be due to the teachers, at the rate they teach, whether they be fast or slow, whether they be good at teaching. I'm not sure. I doubt though that it would be a coincidence that, um all of our four Polynesians would be in the lower class, and I would be the only Polynesian in the higher class in our section.*
- (5) **R:** *You don't think that's a coincidence?*
- (6) **Amoga N:** *No.*
- (7) **R:** *In what way, why do you think that, that happened?*
- (8) **Amoga N:** *Stereotyping. Yeah, stereotyping. The people that organised the schedules from our backgrounds thought that we were, you know, they judged us by, they must have experienced something in Polynesians and they used that in their scheduling to organise the scheduling to put us in the bottom class.*

This was one of the very few interview accounts that suggested institutionalised bias against students based on the criteria of 'being Polynesian'. Within this narrative, racialised power relations were supposedly relayed through the strength of the boundaries insulating categories of agents (Polynesian and other students), discourses (different school curricula) and spaces (higher and lower classes). Specifically, the grouping arrangement of students was claimed to be based on criteria or judgements known to '*the people that organised the schedules*', but not explicitly known to the student body as a whole (turns 4 & 8). Amoga N inferred that the criteria of stereotyping informed the placement of four Polynesian students '*in a lower class.*' Moreover, he stated that lower and higher classes of students had access to different quality teachers (*whether they be good at teaching*) and pacing of knowledge transmission (*whether they be fast or slow*). Initially, Amoga N asserted a causal relation between lower classes, Polynesian students and teacher stereotyping. His initial claim however, was qualified later in the interview when he stated that many of his Polynesian school friends did not work diligently at school, preferring instead to "*talk about parties and stuff like that.*"

All of the 33 interviewees spoke about the arbitrary grouping arrangements of students along ethnic lines in the school grounds, as well as conflicts within and between these groups of students. Data collected from teacher and paraprofessional interviews, as well as fieldnotes, supported these claims. In addition, all of the interviewees talked about the way teachers and students invoked discourses on race relations in pedagogic interactions. Examples were given of students legitimating practices such as school absences, not completing homework, or being late for class via recourse to fictitious

accounts of cultural identity and difference. In addition, some teachers were occasionally accused of racism when they were simply asking students to behave in accordance with school rules and regulations. As extract one illustrated, some teachers may also have utilised discourses of racism in their power struggles with individual and/or groups of students. Extract two, however, refers to systemic bias against one category of students on the basis of ethnicity or race. Other interview (student, parent, paraprofessional and teacher), classroom recording, fieldnotes and document data collected for the study, however, did not support this claim. Indeed the two social justice coordinators at Sanunder Secondary School stated that although many Samoan students had literacy problems, these attributes did not distinguish them from other students. One social justice coordinator put it this way:

*... 80 per cent here of students have literacy problems, learning difficulties. 40 per cent of them have extreme learning difficulties, and that's across the board, so that's white kids as well as the Polynesian kids, so yeah obviously there are problems, but I find it difficult to be able to sort of say "well they're (Samoan students) are worse off than some of the other students".*

The data presented thus far were elicited in response to broad interview questions about students' experiences of schooling. The pedagogic discourses produced by the students were consistent with those transmitted by the Social Justice Department at Sanunder High. The knowledge and skills (instructional component) transmitted via the student symposiums, workshops, newsletter and other mediums such as multicultural days (regulative component) focussed on '*issues of cultural differences and race*'. Students were encouraged to talk about these issues, and asked to think through strategies for improving school practices. In Bernstein's (1996) terms, the mode of these pedagogic practices can be described as therapeutic (radical). The learner within this pedagogic mode is constituted as member of a local dominated group or class. According to Bernstein (1996: 64) the therapeutic (radical) pedagogic mode focuses upon:

Inter-class/group opportunities, material or symbolic, to redress its objective dominated positioning. The pedagogic practice and contexts created by this mode presuppose an emancipatory potential common to all members of this group. This can be actualized by the members own exploration of the source of their imposed powerlessness under conditions of pedagogic renewal.

However, therapeutic pedagogic modes dealing with '*issues of cultural difference and race*' are only one component of schooling. Equal access to school curricula and equal outcomes in the form of pedagogic identities (*i.e.*, trained capacities and lifestyles) are another component. This is a crucial point. Successful training or inculcation in the pedagogic work of schooling implies re-socialisation into the pedagogic identities of particular school subjects such as mathematics, history, science, computing and so forth. Such pedagogic inculcation has an instructional and regulative component. However, this begs the question: does inculcation into pedagogic identities signify colonisation of specific cultural, local or everyday identities or educational equality in terms of trained capacities and lifestyles? As Hunter (1994) argued equity discourses in state education are marred by a profound and striking ambivalence.

In the following section, we turn to students' responses to specific questions about school curricula and day-to-day classroom practices. In responses to these interview questions, students did not talk about '*issues of cultural difference or race*'. This, however, is not meant to suggest that '*cultural difference or race*' issues were absent from everyday classroom practices. Rather, we argue that it is imperative to analyse the silences on these issues within student narratives as power speaks through silence (Bernstein, 1996).

### **Discourses on Pedagogies, Difference, and Disadvantage**

All of the students were asked to elaborate on aspects of day-to-day classroom practice that seemed detrimental or beneficial to their learning. For example, the following data extract is taken from Tala F's responses to questions about aspects of classroom life. This year 11 female student had ambitions of becoming a teacher, a social worker or a travel consultant. She attended church services conducted in Samoan on a weekly basis, and indicated that her parents expected her to speak Samoan at home.

The interview transcript opened with the researcher taking up a point raised during an earlier informal discussion about the behaviour of Samoan students in class. The interviewer asked, "*so it's not just Samoan students who are giving the teachers a hard time?*" Tala F replied, "*yeah, all students. Not all students, most students*". She went on to say that "*most of the time the teachers are very boring*". She then elaborated on this comment.

#### **Extract Three**

*Tala F: ...but sometimes what really bugs me is when teachers talk on and on and on. But I like to do some work, you know, and they give us an example on the board and then come down and give us an exercise to work on. And the students who need help, the teachers will go help them. You know, that's what, when I did that, you know, I found it very easy to learn more and it made it very easy for me to pass things. But now in Grade 11 it's very hard for me to pass because the teachers are talking on and on and on, and the lesson just totally goes out of my head, you know? It just becomes very boring for me.*

Almost any teenager could have provided this account of the banality of classroom life. Of crucial significance to our analysis are the points about communication practices in schooling. Firstly, Tala F suggested that pedagogic communication centred on teacher monologue was counter-productive to the acquisition of knowledge (see also Cazden, 1988; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur & Prendergest, 1997). Indeed, Tala F argued for multiple modes of pedagogic communication, such as, the use of an external text (*an example on the board*) and seatwork (*give us an exercise to work on*). In Bernstein's theoretical terms, pedagogic communication is a realisation of pedagogic discourse (*i.e.*, ID/RD). Secondly, she suggested that the transition from one mode of pedagogic communication to another (*i.e.*, whole class lesson to individual or group-based seatwork) may enable a teacher to assess whether students had acquired the instructional discourses being transmitted, and accordingly modify the pacing of the lesson. This student produced a narrative critical of teachers' deployment of the discursive rules of organisation (sequencing and pacing) and evaluative criteria in the arbitrary

structuring of school curricula. The model of the learner, and the didactic mode of transmission constituted within pedagogic practice were also objects of criticism within this narrative.

In the following extract of data, the vexation of two students with some teachers' communication strategies in mathematics was evident. These two students, Salau P (a male) and Aperila N (a female), were both in Year 12 and had emigrated from New Zealand. They had lived in Australia for nine and six years respectively and thus were acquainted with the nuances of Australian primary, as well as secondary school pedagogy. Their accounts were elicited in response to the question, '*What about you Salau, have you got teachers you'd rather not go to for help?*'

#### **Extract Four**

- (1) **Salau P:** *Yeah, I had this teacher at the beginning of the year and um, I just didn't like the style that she taught in. Like she'd teach us one way and then she'd go "oh, no, no!" Then she'll change it. Or she'll teach us like a really, really long way and then she'll say "oh, there's a easier way." And then she tells us not to use the easier way, she wants us to use the other way. So I don't know. I just don't like her.*
- (2) **R:** *Mmm.*
- (3) **Aperila N:** *Yeah, that's like my Maths teacher too.*
- (4) **Salau P:** *Yeah, Maths teacher*
- (5) **Aperila N:** *... He'll show us the example, but he doesn't write down the formula and the rules. He just writes down the numbers and then we're there for ages, like trying to guess where he got the numbers from. When we ask him to explain it to us, he'll explain it and he'll go "do you understand now?" and I go "yeah". But then when he goes, it all goes again with him.*

This particular account is indicative of the extent of students' general insights into dilemmas posed by the 'how' of pedagogic practice, or transmission of school knowledge. The 'how' of pedagogic practice is constituted by regulative discourse. In our analysis of extract four, we want to focus on the comments made about: '*trying to guess where he got the numbers from*' (turn 5). Both students were critical of teachers who did not explain mathematical formulae and rules explicitly. In particular, Salau P criticised a teacher who detailed different ways of solving mathematical problems (*a really, really long way and an easier way*), but then told students not to use the '*easier way*'. In other words, students were expected to display the procedures of mathematical reasoning rather than necessarily obtain the correct answer. However, this student remained confused about the criteria of mathematical assessment. Aperila N expressed similar frustration in relation to the acquisition of mathematical knowledge. He pointed repeatedly to the lack of explicitness in a particular teacher's style of instruction. Twenty-two of the thirty-three students' interview accounts reiterated a need for teachers to '*explain*'. On average, usually in relation to comments such as '*I don't understand*' and '*they don't understand*', twenty-two students stated that either explanation and/or understanding were missing from the transmission of school knowledge.

Explicit pedagogic modes imply strong relations of social control exercised by the teacher in terms of the principles generating the selection, organisation and evaluative criteria of school knowledge. Within this pedagogic mode, students are socialised into the pedagogic identities of school subjects

by a teacher who makes explicit the discursive and moral order of the classroom. This may entail acknowledging differences between the discursive and moral order of junior and senior schooling, as well as between the institutions of school and home/church.

Numerous studies have focussed on how pedagogic communication in the classroom may marginalise students who are unfamiliar with the codes or rules of this specialised talk. These studies have indicated that differences in the forms of talk in the home (parent-child relations), church (minister-congregation member relations) and school (teacher-child relations) may affect student acquisition of school knowledge. For example, Jordan, Hu-pei and Joesting (1981), Ochs (1988), Pitt and Macpherson (1974), and Tiaita (1998) found dramatic differences between the communicative conventions of the homes of Pacific Islander students and those they were likely to encounter in their classrooms. On this point, Jordan *et al.*, (1981: 28) suggested that:

two major themes can be seen to emerge from studies bearing on the patterning of teaching and learning in Pacific Islands children. First, the usual means of learning is observation and imitation of a model. Second, the operations learned are clearly related to the final goal. To these themes must be added the strong peer orientation and affiliation of these children, resulting in tendencies to cooperation and mutuality in task performance. The contrast with many of the teaching practices employed in classrooms is a sharp one.

Closer to the research work reported in this paper was an ethnographic study undertaken by Alison Jones (1991) in one all girls inner city secondary school in New Zealand, with a high population of working class Pacific Islander girls. Specifically, Jones (1991: 15) was interested in “the barriers the school might (inadvertently or otherwise) provide to their (working class Pacific Islander girls’ educational) success.” She found that the girls had a model of teaching and learning which gave “primary importance to the teachers’ words and authority” (Jones, 1991: 95). In addition, Jones (1991) found that the Pacific Islander girls in her study avoided being singled out to answer ‘substantive’ questions. They also attempted to manipulate their teachers into their own preferred styles of teaching and learning. Moreover, she argued that the classroom teachers had difficulty relating school curricula to students’ experiences so that they could take the knowledge on board, and in so doing modify their existing knowledge base. Jones (1991) argued that these pedagogical practices contributed to the reproduction of educational inequality for working class Pacific Islander girls in her case study school.

Students also attributed poor schooling outcomes to difficulties with the language of transmission, that is, school English. For example, the accounts of students such as Lafitaga M and Tali P ( both male, Year 10 students) below, pointed to problems with the selection, sequencing and pacing of knowledge in the subject, English. Both of these students had lived in Australia for only two years, having migrated from New Zealand with their families. Tali P wanted to become a police officer, while Lafitaga M planned to become a minister of religion. They were asked questions relating specifically to the school subject, English.

### Extract Five

- (1) **R:** *OK, can you tell me something about ... the books that you're reading at school in English? Have you got um, set texts that you've got to read in English?*
- (2) **Tali P:** *We used to do 'The Outsiders'*
- (3) **R:** *Mmm.*
- (4) **Tali P:** *Yeah, but it's boring. But the movie was all right.*
- (5) **R:** *Yeah? Why is it boring?*
- (6) **Tali P:** *Because.*
- (7) **Lafitaga M:** *Because there's too much, oh, when you're reading, um, there's words that you don't know.*
- (8) **R:** *Yeah?*
- (9) **Lafitaga M:** *Like some of them are hard, some of them are hard to pronounce and, you know, you don't know what it means and that.*

Turns 7 and 9 indicate that the set text 'The Outsiders' posed some problems of meaning for Lafitaga M, although in general he did not experience difficulty understanding the film version of the text. The students seemed to identify with, or relate to, the general theme or topic of youth alienation explored in this text. In particular, they attributed their boredom with this novel to difficulties in understanding the meaning of specific vocabulary.

In the following extract of data (extract six), Vave T and Leaula S talked about their experience of reading the play Macbeth. These two young males were in Year 12 and Macbeth was the set text in the subject English. The interview began with a discussion of the relative ease/difficulty of understanding the text. Leaula S found the text difficult while Vave T found it easy, because he had studied it the previous year at another school. The interview moved on to the storyline of Macbeth.

### Extract Six

- (1) **R:** *What about the story though? Do you think that that's relevant to you, you know, do you think there are aspects of the story that, that can teach you how to live life and that sort of thing?*
- (2) **Vave T:** *In a way the story has a message of its own [- like it's about how people treated when*
- (3) **Leaula S:** *[Mmm*
- (4) **Vave T:** *They were like [in the Samoan way of life you had your chief of the*
- (5) **Leaula S:** *[Samoan, the Samoan*
- (6) **Vave T:** *family or the village and like, he's really proud of himself because he become chief he's got the chief name and the title and like if he get such a headswell he start treating other people real badly someone would think "oh, that somethings got to be done to stop him". And like with Macbeth it was just like Macbeth and the king and then, was it, Banquo his friend? How Macbeth became greedy and he had to kill all them so that he was the only one that was left in power over all the other people. So, in a way, it shows that there are other ways apart from mucking people up, hurting other people's feelings to get to where you want to be.*

Vave T seemed to relate easily to Macbeth. In the above extract of data, he drew an analogy between power relations in the play and power relations within Samoan village life. We want to emphasise that none of the students interviewed for the study expressed specific concerns about the theme or topics of the set school texts.

The following account provided by Sami S and Tavita A was indicative of the writing difficulties students experienced with school work. This was also a problem identified by teachers interviewed

for the study (see Dooley *et.al.*, 2000).

Both these young males had lived in Australia less than two years, although Tavita A was from ‘American Samoa’ and thus had lived in an English speaking country. Sami wanted to be a bankteller and Tavita a teacher or carpenter. The extract of data was taken from an interview discussion about difficulties encountered in general via the use of English as the medium of communication between teacher and student. In particular, the accounts of these students highlight dilemmas involved with students communicating to teachers in written English.

### **Extract Seven**

- (1) **R:** *Is it in some subjects that writing is difficult, is a problem, or is it just writing in general?*
- (2) **Tavita A:** *Yeah. Writing in general.*
- (3) **Sami S:** *Sometimes it's hard writing in English ( ).*
- (4) **R:** *So what's the problem, do you think? Is it trying to work out what word to put down, or trying to work out what order to put the words in? Or what?*
- (5) **Sami S:** *Trying to work out what words to put down.*

All but two of the students' accounts used the word ‘*hard*’ to describe classroom communication, on average five times per interview. The students' accounts frequently described school-work as ‘*too hard*’ and ‘*very hard*’, even while they reiterated that they ‘*work hard*’. Students also described their engagement with ‘*long words*’, ‘*big words*’, ‘*hard words*’ and words ‘*I don't know*’, in similar fashion as ‘*too hard*’ despite the fact that they ‘*worked hard*’.

The problems noted by students in extracts five, six and seven above do not relate solely to ‘**what**’ knowledge was selected or included as school curricula (instructional discourse). Students did identify with the topics of alienation and power struggles, and in some cases drew contrasts with the politics of Samoan community and family life. Rather, the problem was with the ‘**how**’ of transmission, or the rules of sequencing, pacing and evaluative criteria (*i.e.*, discursive order). In Bernstein's terms, the regulative discourse constituted an arbitrary internal order to the instructional discourse. This arbitrary ordering of school knowledge did not meet the needs of the student clientele with literacy problems which included approximately three-quarters of the Samoan students attending Sanunder High. Moreover, the regulative discourse constituted the model of the learner, teacher and the pedagogic relation. This regulative discourse presumed a normative model of a learner who could speak English as a first language and had acquired high levels of reading and writing proficiency. Samoan and other students enrolled at Sanunder High were ‘othered’ by this normative model of the learner. The model of the pedagogic relation assumed a cohort of students familiar with the principles of school communication, and readily able to access the knowledge transmitted by the teacher. The social worlds inhabited by the Samoan students were ordered by principles of communication different from those of the case study school.

The pedagogic practices in extracts 3-7 were oriented to a performance mode. According to



Bernstein (1996:57), a performance mode of pedagogy

places the emphasis upon a specific output of the acquirer, upon a particular text the acquirer is expected to construct, and upon the specialised skills necessary to the production of this specific output, text or product.

This mode of pedagogic practice is designed to meet “the technical objective of government to achieve a socially optimal distribution of trained capacities and lifestyles” (Hunter, 1994: 95). At Sanunder High this performance pedagogic mode of developing generic skills was directly linked to the instrumentalities of the local market. As Bernstein (1996: 72) argues performance modes of pedagogy that focus on generic skills are

based on a new concept of ‘work’ and ‘life’ which might be called ‘short-termism’. This is where a skill, task, area of work, undergoes continuous development, disappearance or replacement; where life experience cannot be based on stable expectations of the future and one’s location in it. Under these circumstances it is considered that a vital new ability must be developed: ‘trainability’, the ability to profit from continuous pedagogic re-formations and so cope with the new requirements of ‘work’ and ‘life’.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview data in this paper illustrates accommodations between a case study school, Sanunder, and the family/community reached on the basis of the hybrid, bureaucratic pastoral organisation of state schooling. The analysis shows how these accommodations were by a cohort of Samoan students attending a state-designated disadvantaged school. It highlights the complexities of realising social justice in education when equality in educational outcomes and the maintenance of local cultural identities are equally valued in pedagogic practice.

The moral imperative for self-realisation, that is, dealing with issues of ‘*cultural differences and race*’, was a dominant theme within the student narratives. According to the students, this imperative was supported by an array of therapeutic pedagogies organised and enacted in the school. To the extent that the students identified as Samoan and gave priority to that identity in their engagement with the pedagogic discourse of the school, it could be argued that social justice in terms of enabling local cultural identities was in fact realised.

The realisation of equal outcomes, understood as the acquisition of trained capacities, was also a goal of the school. The analysis indicates that the achievement of this goal was ostensibly through the transmission of generic skills in performance modes of pedagogy. However, student narratives indicate that this goal was far from reached. In the case of this study, most of the students who were performing poorly in an academic sense wanted to improve their results. Yet they were trapped in a situation of failure because ultimately the tools and resources at their disposal did not allow them to engage with the pedagogic discourse of the school. Moreover, according to the students interviewed for this study many teachers did not understand ‘the politics of difference’ in this particular context. ‘Knowing’ students from their least-advantaged perspective implies understanding the difficulties that they may experience with

particular school subjects and using this knowledge to improve learning outcomes. Differences in pedagogic discourses and practices between the school and the institutions of the home and community may impede the acquisition of school knowledge. Yet, according to the social justice coordinators, '*issues of cultural difference and race*' were defined narrowly and acknowledged in forums outside the formal transmission of school knowledge. Moreover, these forums were constituted by therapeutic modes of pedagogy and thus were oriented to empowering students through talk about cultural identity and difference.

The student narratives illuminate the contradictory and conflicting elements within equity and social justice discourses. Therapeutic pedagogic modes that aim to empower oppressed groups of students by challenging the way the '*school colonises the identities of students*' may work against the performance modes of pedagogy geared to equality of educational outcomes. The therapeutic (radical) mode of pedagogy recognises the inherent skills and knowledge of an oppressed group or class, while the performance (generic) pedagogy aims to re-socialise groups of learners into the trained capacities required by the state through the inculcation of literacy, numeracy and other skills and knowledge. How teachers work through the contradictory and conflicting discourses of social justice and ideological struggles over the 'right' pedagogy will have profound influences on the educational outcomes of 'least-advantaged' students.

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### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> There are 13 years of schooling in the Queensland school system: a preschool year; compulsory primary schooling (Years 1-7); compulsory junior secondary schooling (Years 8-10) and post-compulsory senior secondary schooling (Years 11-12). State secondary schools provide education for students enrolled in Years 8-12. Many of the Samoan students interviewed for the study attended Sanunder High, a secondary school situated in a suburb ranked in the National census data as amongst the lowest 5% of all the local statistical areas of the State of Queensland with respect to median household income. The suburb's youth (15-24 years) and adult (25+ years) unemployment levels of 31.4% and 21.7% were described as significantly higher than the city averages of 14.1% and 9.9% respectively. The occupational profile of the suburb was mostly clerical, sales and service, and trade work, with under-representation of professions (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998). A State Electoral Commission profile indicated that the school was in the electorate with the highest percentage of overseas-born residents in Queensland (33.67% compared to a state average of 17.41%). The suburb also had the highest percentage of residents speaking languages other than English at home (26.77% compared to a state average of 7.16%) (Electoral Commission Queensland 1998).

<sup>2</sup> This group has been included in the category 'disadvantaged' as educational retention rates and attainment levels continue to be low.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *The English Syllabus for Years 1 to 10* (Education Queensland, 1994) promoted English programs that included the diverse cultural heritages of students and were informed by critical perspectives. With respect to students of non English-speaking background, the Cultural and Language Diversity in Education policy (Education Queensland, 1995) established Departmental accountability for the provision of a socially-just curriculum, development of Departmental officers' understandings of racism and cultural inclusion, and the participation of parents of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in school processes and decision making (Dooley, Exley & Singh, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The targeted student groups of the Social Justice Strategy were:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander...Cultural and Language Diversity...Disability...Educational Risk...Geographic Isolation...Gifts and Talents...Learning Impairment and Learning Difficulty...[and]...Low Socioeconomic Background (Department of Education, 1994b, n.p.).

In practice, targeting these groups meant educational provision in terms of access, services and opportunities. Provision, in turn, referred to what were perceived as the needs of students from these groups. This does not imply that these target groups were not the subject of conflict and contestation. Girls as a target group of disadvantage were removed from the list, and boys with literacy problems were identified as a disadvantaged category.

<sup>5</sup> Data pertaining to the results of literacy (reading and viewing: writing) and numeracy (number, measurement and space) tests administered in 1997 to 46, 762 students in Year 6 across the state of Queensland, revealed that the performance of students who indicated that a Pacific Islander language was spoken at home was extremely below the performance of the whole cohort of students in all areas of the tests (strands of literacy and numeracy). This data further revealed that 40% of students who indicated that they spoke a Pacific Islander language at home had spent less than two years in Australia. 69% of the students who stated that a Pacific Islander language was spoken at home indicated that the home language was Samoan (Queensland Schools Curriculum Council, 1998). From the literature it is clear that the educational achievement of Samoan children in New Zealand, as in diasporic communities in the U.S., is generally low (Graves, Graves, Vineta, Sam & Sam, 1982; Jones, 1991; Mara, Foliaki & Coxon, 1994; Mau, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> For confidentiality reasons, all names of people and places used in this paper are pseudonyms.

<sup>7</sup> Approximately 100 Pacific Islander students were enrolled at Sanunder High at the time of this study.

<sup>8</sup> This process of selecting interview participants, however, created some tension in one case study school, Sanunder. One home-liaison officer (Peone Avao) criticized the researchers' criteria for selecting interview participants suggesting that it could lead to the production of unfavourable representations of the 'Samoan' student population. Since much of her work involved challenging negative or pathological depictions of 'Samoan' culture and identity, she insisted on maintaining some control over (a) who was interviewed, and (b) the content of the interview. For an example of a pathological depiction of Samoan children see the article 'Slavery trap for young Samoans' (Cole, 2000, p.1).

<sup>9</sup> Christian pastoralism provided the principles for the constitution of pastoral pedagogy. According to Hunter (1994: 59) christian pedagogy was ". an induction into the arts of problematisation and forms of ethical labour through which individuals 'became the kind of people' capable of acting on the basis of moral values or revealed truth. It was, in short, a milieu for forming a particular comportment of the self and way of living."

<sup>10</sup> Data analyses were undertaken in five stages:

**Stage 1:** interview data was quantified and tabulated in terms of the following criteria: (1) gender; (2) school grade/year of enrolment; (3) home language(s) – reading, writing, viewing, and speaking; (4) career aspirations; (5) church membership and attendance; (6) length of residency in Australia; (7) country of origin of parents; and (8) ethnic/national identification.

**Stage 2:** Each interview transcript was divided into episodes. An episode commenced with an interview question and ended when the interviewee completed the response to this question. Each data episode was described using an internal language of description. This entailed detailing the question asked of the interviewee and the interviewee's full response using the language of the interview data.

**Stage 3:** A separate file was created for each interview question. In some cases interview questions were combined together and all 33 responses were collated. Similarities and differences between interviewees responses to questions were recorded.

**Stage 4:** An external language of description or theoretical framework was developed to enable reading of the interview data in terms of: who got access to what forms of knowledge. Power relations were analysed through the strength of the symbolic boundaries insulating categories of: agents (students, teachers), discourses (instructional texts), and institutional spaces. The relations within and between these categories were analysed by asking: who controlled what?

**Stage 5:** Indicative extracts of data relating to each of the interview questions were selected and analysed using the theoretical tools outlined in the paper. Themes emerging from this stage of data analysis were quantified.

<sup>11</sup> The following transcription conventions have been used:

**R** Researcher;  
**TA** Teacher Aide; and  
 [ overlapping speech.  
 ( ) unclear word or phrase  
 (writing) possible word/phrase  
 [racism] added or modified word/phrase to enhance clarity of transcript  
 ... deleted words  
 ((pause)) silence in conversation

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